

Exodus of European intelligentsia in France: Borders, papers, visas – Varian Fry's action of relief

Ana Maria Alves

CLLC/ESSE, Instituto Politécnico de Bragança

amalves@ipb.pt

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: ÉXODO, *INTELLIGENTSIA*, FRONTEIRA, VISTOS, SOCORRO, VARIAN FRY.

KEYWORDS: EXODUS, *INTELLIGENTSIA*, BORDER, VISAS, RELIEF, VARIAN FRY.

The history of the resistance and rescue is made up of individual facts [...] of thousands of personal stories, without which they would not even have occurred. (Cohen, 1993: 11)¹

This account of Asher Cohen taken out of the book entitled *Persécutions et sauvetage. Juifs et Français sous l'Occupation et sous Vichy (Persecutions and rescue. Jewish and French under the Occupation and Vichy)* takes us into a context of an occupied France which after the Armistice signature, June 22, 1940, becomes a giant trap for refugees.

Article 19 of the famous Armistice foresaw "the delivery at the request of the citizens of the Reich to the occupying authorities. German but also Czech or Austrian opponents of the Nazi regime who believed to be safe in what they regarded as the homeland of human

¹ Author's translation of: "L'histoire de la résistance et du sauvetage est composée de faits individuels [...] de milliers d'histoires personnelles, sans lesquelles elles n'auraient même pas eu lieu".

rights found themselves in danger"² (Loyer, 2007p. 32). The arrival to power of Hitler changes the status of intellectuals that had made the choice of being in France freely from emigrant to exile.

This sad clause rushes "all the undesirable in the panic of the exodus"³ (Loyer, 2001, p. 140), but it is also the reason that has motivated "some American citizens deeply shocked by this theft of the right of asylum"⁴ (Eggers, 2000, p. 51) to set up humanitarian organizations to save those foreigners who had to consider a new exile.

This evasion from the German authorities increased considerably the search for out-bound visas by "the most threatened [...], the intellectuals particularly exposed and wanted [...] by the Germans"⁵ (Eggers, 2000, p. 57). Unfortunately, this search was slowed down due to "bureaucratic tape"⁶ (Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, 1981, p. 247). The purpose of these humanitarian actions was to relieve this European *intelligentsia*.

Our intention is to capture the dilemmas of those who have been involved in these humanitarian activities to see how some men were able to preserve human dignity.

Many individuals have been saved by these men who were later recognized by international institutions which paid tribute to them and perpetuated their courageous acts so that they would not be forgotten by future generations.

The rescue theme can be explained under several approaches. Due to the choice of our author Varian Fry, it seems obvious to us to trace the route of the rescue triggered by the organized rescue.

THE ORGANIZED RESCUE BY AN *OUTLAW*: VARIAN FRY

This American sent to France, officially as a journalist, was in reality, the *Emergency Rescue Committee*, a humanitarian organization founded in New York and chaired according to Jean-Marie Guillon by:

² Author's translation of: "la livraison sur demande des ressortissants du Reich aux autorités occupantes. Les opposants allemands mais aussi tchèques ou autrichiens au régime nazi qui s'étaient crus en sécurité dans ce qu'ils regardaient comme la patrie des Droits de l'homme étaient ainsi mis en péril".

³ Author's translation of: "tous les indésirables dans l'affolement de l'exode".

⁴ Author's translation of: "certains citoyens américains profondément choqués par ce vol du droit d'asile".

⁵ Author's translation of: "les plus menacés [...], les intellectuels particulièrement exposés et recherchés [...] par les Allemands".

⁶ Author's translation of: "l'obstruction bureaucratique".

[...] Frank Kingdon, one of the most seen personalities within the Methodist Church, he relies on the leadership of the American Friends of German Freedom and benefits from the commitment of influential academics as well as assistance from the Museum of Modern Art in New York, of the Rockefeller Foundation, from the New School for Social Research and the New World Resttlement Found alongside. His action is supported by Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the president of the United States of America, who will be able to convince the State Department to grant "rescue visas" (emergency visa) out of the immigration quotas⁷. (Guillon, 1999, pp. 34-35)

Varian Fry founded in Marseille, a representation of this cell under the name of American Relief Center. It was, initially, to take a look around places in the occupied area to verify the situation of foreign refugees especially the anti-Nazi Germans. His mission was to get out of Europe, "a considerable number of writers, artists, critics or various figures of the intellectual and political scene [...] who might want to and have to run away from the occupied France"⁸ (Loyer, 2001, p. 143). It was obvious that these anti-Nazis would sooner or later be delivered to the Gestapo. Fry was to help them by drawing a path that would allow them to reach a neutral country and from there the United States of America. According to Emmanuelle Loyer, there was at the time "two geographical routes that allowed them to leave the country: the departure from Marseille with a stopover in the West Indies - the Martinique route taken by many exiles between February and May 41 - or the passage through Spain and Portugal, by train [...] to get to Lisbon, and from there, to sail to New York. (...) The second route complicated things because it required visas"⁹ (Loyer, 2007, p. 55). Renée Dray-Bensouan in his article *Les filières d'émigration juives de 1940 à 1942 à Marseille (Jewish emigration channels from 1940 to 1942 in Marseille)* adds to these geographic routes the one of the "emigration towards China and Shanghai since September

⁷ Author's translation of: "Frank Kingdon, l'une des personnalités les plus en vue de l'Eglise méthodiste, il repose sur l'équipe dirigeante de l'Américan Friends of German Freedom et bénéficie de l'engagement à ses côtés d'universitaires influents ainsi que de l'aide du Museum of Modern Art de New York, de la Fondation Rockefeller, de la New School for Social Research et du New World Resttlement Found. Son action reçoit l'appui d'Eleanor Roosvelt, l'épouse du président des Etats-unis, qui parviendra à convaincre le Département d'Etat d'accorder des "visas de sauvetage" (emergency visa) hors quotas d'immigration".

⁸ Author's translation of: "un nombre considérable d'écrivains, artistes, critiques ou figures diverses de la scène intellectuelle et politique [...] qui pourraient vouloir et devoir s'enfuir de la France assujettie".

⁹ Author's translation of: "deux voies géographiques qui permettaient de quitter le pays: le départ de Marseille avec étape aux Antilles – la route martiniquaise empruntée par beaucoup d'exilés entre février et mai 41 – ou le passage par l'Espagne et le Portugal, par le train [...] pour aboutir à Lisbonne, et de là, s'embarquer à New-York. [...]. La deuxième voie compliquait les choses car elle nécessitait des visas".

1940. "Shanghai is sometimes a lure used by emigrants who have another final destination, and who take advantage of the ease of obtaining a Chinese visa to later get another one to transit to Portugal. Nevertheless this route has been used, despite its great difficulties, at least until December 1941"¹⁰ (Dray-Bensouan, 2000, p. 20).

The official route to leave Europe in the summer 1940 was restricted to a limited number of refugees who were to:

[...] in the first place look for a ticket for a passage on a boat with deposit, payment done through associations of rescue from Marseille, Casablanca, Lisbon or from New York - getting the ticket depended on getting an immigration visa from host countries, and vice versa! The period of validity of this visa was limited [...]. It was necessary to obtain an outbound visa from France, of limited validity too, a medical certificate, an authorization to export money necessary to travel... In the case of interns allowed to emigrate, they had to bring a certificate of good conduct in the camps, an extract from police records, finally a certificate of discharge of the camp of the Milles (...) last step before boarding in Marseille or departure by train through Spain¹¹. (Grandjonc, 1999, p. 45)

Fry had been ordered to find rescue alternatives to avoid the "paper war", "even if the French authorities considered such ways to be illegal"¹² (Obschernitzki, 1999, p. 49). He had been assigned in his letter of mission to get informed "on the means of transport, in particular on the use of coasters between this city and the coast of Africa, in order to know if it was possible or reasonable to leave people isolated in Algeria or in Casablanca or if it

¹⁰ Author's translation of: " l'émigration vers la Chine et Shanghai dès septembre 1940. Shanghai est parfois un leurre utilisé par les émigrants qui ont en vue une destination finale autre, et qui profitent des facilités à obtenir un visa chinois en vue d'un visa de transit pour le Portugal. Cette voie a cependant servi, malgré les grandes difficultés, au moins jusqu'en décembre 1941".

¹¹ Author's translation of: "se procurer en premier lieu un billet de passage sur un bateau avec dépôt de caution, paiement par l'intermédiaire des associations de secours de Marseille, à Casablanca, à Lisbonne ou depuis New-York – l'obtention du billet étant liée à celle d'un visa d'immigration pour un pays d'accueil, et vice versa! La durée de validité de ce visa était limitée [...]. Il était nécessaire de se procurer un visa de sortie de France, a validité également limitée, une attestation médicale, une autorisation d'exportation de l'argent indispensable au voyage... Dans le cas d'internés autorisés à émigrer, il fallait en outre une attestation de bonne conduite dans les camps, un extrait de casier judiciaire, enfin un certificat de libération du camp des Milles [...] dernière étape avant l'embarquement à Marseille ou le départ en train par l'Espagne".

¹² Author's translation of: "guerre des papiers " " même si les autorités françaises jugeaient de tels moyens illégaux".

was better to use a sort of [collective] charter, which would involve an unofficial ferry for refugees"¹³ (Obschernitzki, 1999, p. 49).

Varian Fry presented the results of this experience in 1945, in his book, *Surrender on Demand*, book which had no success at the time because it "bothered". It's also about this experience that Pierre Sauvage insists on saying that "the American public opinion was not ready to hear the grievances that Fry wanted to issue on American policy towards refugees and his 'shame' of American citizen before this policy"¹⁴ (Sauvage, 1999, p. 26). The book in which he had shared the testimony of his adventure at the Relief Center was only published in France in 1999 under the title *La liste noire (The Black List)* which was published by Plon and a new edition was published in 2008 in Agone by Fry's last wife, Annette and entitled *Livrer sur Demande... Quand les artistes, les dissidents et les Juifs fuyaient les nazis (Delivered on Request... When artists, dissidents and Jews fled the Nazis)*.

Varian Fry tells the story of a young American (himself), former Harvard alumni, born into a well-off family, who landed at Marseille, on 14 August 1940, two months after the defeat of France and a year and a half before the United States of America are finally caught in the war.

Officially, invested by the U.S. Government, with a specific mission: he was given a list of two hundred refugees, musicians, painters, writers, all intellectuals and artists "rushed in Marseille in the vortex of the exodus"¹⁵ (Guiraud, 1999, p. 22), threatened by the Nazis, and he must, at all costs, send them to America. There were

[...] lists elaborated from consultations in different academic, literary, artistic and journalistic circles... These lists were obviously incomplete, obviously heterogeneous. Created thousands of kilometers away, their meaning was urgent, brutal, and definite in France. A missing name, another crossed out and all hope was broken, a life on hold¹⁶. (Loyer, 2007, p. 54)

¹³ Author's translation of: "sur les moyens de transport, en particulier sur l'utilisation de caboteurs entre cette ville et la côte africaine, afin de savoir s'il est possible ou raisonnable de faire partir des personnes isolées en Algérie ou à Casablanca ou s'il vaut mieux utiliser une sorte de charter [collectif], ce qui impliquerait un ferry inofficiel pour réfugiés".

¹⁴ Author's translation of: "l'opinion publique américaine n'était pas disponible à entendre les griefs que Fry voulait émettre sur la politique américaine à l'égard des réfugiés et sa "honte" de citoyen américain devant cette politique".

¹⁵ Author's translation of: "précipités à Marseille dans le tourbillon de l'exode".

¹⁶ Author's translation of: "listes nées de consultations dans les différents milieux universitaires, littéraires, artistiques et journalistiques... Ces listes étaient forcément incomplètes, forcément hétérogènes. Forgées à des

In this list were the names of Dali, Marc Chagall, Max Ernst and her friend Peggy Guggenheim, Marcel Duchamp, Jean Malaquais, André Breton and Hannah Arendt, Anna Seghers, Victor Serge, André Masson, Heinrich and Nelly Mann and many more, all artists and intellectuals threatened by the Nazi doctrines who he most helped during the bureaucracy of Pétain. Fry still offers Picasso, Matisse, Gide and Malraux a visa to the United States but those not believing to be in danger refused to go into exile¹⁷. In his article, *La culture Refuge (Culture Shelter)*, Jean-Michel Guiraud says that:

[...] the southern area became the space-refuge of the intellectual migration and Marseille [...] represented since the defeat one of the most important poles of the culture-refuge for the withdrawn of the disaster. The city had attracted the most threatened intellectuals, those whom the Vichy regime abhorred and ranked among the “undesirable” for political “racial” or xenophobic reasons¹⁸. (Guiraud, 1999, p. 19)

From the “Splendid” hotel, in Marseille, where is temporarily installed the ARC (American Rescue Center) subsidiary, Varian Fry established a huge network to help Jews and refugees fleeing the Nazi regime, the French militia and Gestapo issuing them visas and false passports that allowed them to go to Spain to reach Lisbon. According to Jean-Marie Guillon and Doris Obschernitzki, “the ARC is using all means, legal and illegal. The support of a vice-consul of the United States, Hiram Bingham, and some French officials is valuable; however it would be insufficient without all those who provide false papers, options of departure, foreign exchange on the black market, etc. All in all, dozens of permanent staff and volunteers are going to participate in this rescue work”¹⁹ (Guillon and Obschernitzki, 1999, p. 37).

milliers de kilomètres, elles prenaient une signification urgente, brutale définitive en France. Un nom absent, un nom rayé et c’étaient un espoir brisé, une vie en suspens”.

¹⁷ Cf. Gilles Ragache, Jean, R. Ragache (1988). *La vie quotidienne des écrivains et des artistes sous l’Occupation* (pp. 86-87). Paris: Hachette.

¹⁸ Author’s translation of: “la zone sud était devenue l’espace-refuge de la migration intellectuelle et Marseille [...] représentait depuis la défaite un des pôles les plus importants de la culture-refuge pour les repliés du désastre. La ville avait attiré les intellectuels les plus menacés, ceux que le régime de Vichy abhorrait et classait parmi les “indésirables” pour raisons politiques, “raciales” ou xénophobes”.

¹⁹ Author’s translation of: “le CAS utilise «tous les moyens, légaux et illégaux. L’appui d’un vice-consul des Etats-Unis, Hiram Bingham, et de certains fonctionnaires français est précieux ; cependant il serait insuffisant sans tous ceux qui procurent faux papiers, possibilités de départ, change au marché noir, etc. Au total, plusieurs dizaines de permanents et de bénévoles vont participer à ce travail de sauvetage”.

In early September, as Jean-Marie Guillon points out “the influx of refugees is as it transfers the office at 60 Grignan Street before settling at 18 Garibaldi Boulevard from January 1, 1941”²⁰ (Guillon, 1999, p. 37). The American Rescue Center increases these operations with the French authorities and the American Consulate in order to obtain the necessary visas for refugees of the Spanish Civil War, but also for German-speaking exiles forced to leave their country because of “the Nazi dictatorship [that] leads to successive waves of exile [...]. the year 1933 [...] sees twenty-five thousand German refugees in France”²¹ (Mencherini and Grandjonc, 1999, p. 14) requesting visas. According to Mencherini and Grandjonc, “the waves following the referendum on the Saarland, to the racist laws of Nuremberg, to the persecution against “degenerated art”, [then the Austrians Jews after the] “Kristallnacht”, arrived in Marseille looking for passage to a safe haven”²² (Mencherini and Grandjonc, 1999, p. 14).

From 1939, these waves of foreigners arrived in France had led to the opening of internment camps like camp des Milles, transformed into a transit camp for a large part of the European intelligentsia: musicians, architects and men of science, writers, academics and artists. The figure of 1800 interns was quickly reached. In total, it is estimated that between 1939 and 1942, 10,000 individuals from 27 nationalities were interned at camp des Milles.

The influx of refugees is as that the offices on Garibaldi Street prove to be too narrow to receive so many foreigners. Some of them have found shelter in the South of France including in Sanary-sur-Mer where we will meet a large part of the German intelligentsia who takes refuge there temporarily and at the Air-Bel villa in Marseille last port of exit facing the approach of the Nazi invasion.

It is in this Air-Bel villa later named “Castle hope-visa” because half of its inhabitants was waiting for a visa²³ (Guillon and Obschernitzki, 1999, p. 43) that Varian Fry finds refuge for himself, his wife, his son and several intellectuals including the Surrealists artists waiting for a departure to the Americas.

Fry will work, in collaboration with the Rockefeller Foundation, represented in Lisbon by Alexandre Kaminsky who received the exiles who took “the route which had already

²⁰ Author’s translation of: “l’afflux des réfugiés est tel qu’il transfère le bureau au 60 rue Grignan avant de s’installer au 18 boulevard Garibaldi à partir du 1^{er} janvier 1941”.

²¹ Author’s translation of: “la dictature nazie [qui] entraîne des vagues successives d’exil [...]. l’année 1933 [...] voit déjà vingt-cinq mille réfugiés allemands en France”.

²² Author’s translation of: “les vagues consécutives au référendum sur la Sarre, aux lois racistes de Nuremberg, aux persécutions contre “l’art dégénéré”.

²³ Author’s translation of: “Château espère-visa” parce que la moitié de ses habitants attendait un visa”.

proved to be the main and most secure one, through the Pyrenees, Spain and Portugal"²⁴ (Obschernitzki, 1999, p. 50). The ARC had attempted from October 1940 to May 1941 to seek another route than the Pyrenean known as route "F". A maritime underground route had been put to try, but the experience turned short because the first boarding in a private yacht of twenty-two customers who had in view the North African coast was arrested by the Coastguard police. The maritime route was a failure leaving the Pyrenean route as the main network by which refugees - hopeless, blocked by real wall of papers, without exit visas from France-, circulated going through a path of smuggler. Varian Fry organized clandestine routes on foot across the Pyrenees crossing Spain from which fugitives were taking the road, or the train to Lisbon.

Fry "wanted to save all of them, not only the most famous ones"²⁵ (Schiffrin, 2007: 33). Lisa Fittko's testimony, 'smuggler' for the American Rescue Center, retells a conversation with Fry which shows the drama lived by this man that unfortunately had to make a choice between the ones he tried to rescue:

You have helped hundreds of people [she says], and many more have still hope in yourself. But there are still the others: the ones who are not famous, the ones who are not connected. And they are many, all the ones you cannot help. (...) I would not like to be in your [...] shoes, I would not like to have the power to decide which life gets to be saved²⁶. (Fittko, 1998, p. 241)

Fry also admits that "deciding who should or should not receive assistance is the worst thing"²⁷ (Fry, 1999: 43). Even if this dilemma is revolting, according to former American Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Fry succeeds to save "4000 people"²⁸ (Laurent, 2000, p. 58)

On 29 August 1941, Fry is arrested and expelled by the Vichy Government, for "protecting the Jews and the anti-Nazis"²⁹ (Fry, 2008, p. 252). His right-hand man, Daniel Bénédicté,

²⁴ Author's translation of: "la filière qui s'était déjà avérée la principale et la plus sûre, celle à travers les Pyrénées, l'Espagne et le Portugal".

²⁵ Author's translation of: "voulait sauver le plus grand nombre, pas seulement les plus célèbres".

²⁶ Author's translation of: "Vous avez aidé des centaines de gens [dit-elle], et beaucoup d'autres encore mettent tous leurs espoirs en vous. Mais il y a aussi tous les autres : ceux qui ne sont pas célèbres, qui n'ont pas de relations. Et ils ne sont que trop nombreux, tous ceux que vous ne pouvez pas aider. (...) je n'aimerais pas être dans [...] peau, je n'aimerais pas avoir le pouvoir de décider quelle vie doit être sauvée".

²⁷ Author's translation of: "trancher qui doit ou non bénéficier d'une aide est la pire des choses".

²⁸ Author's translation of: "4000 personnes".

²⁹ Author's translation of: "protégé les Juifs et les anti-nazis".

continues his action. Fry returns to the United States where he is ignored, sidelined, because he has deviated from his true mission as his moral conscience has led him to humanitarian resistance and disobedience. Indeed, before the horror, he feels to have the duty to save many unknowns, quite anonymous, going from official to clandestine activities "quandering" the money and the means put at his disposal by the American Rescue Center. Due to this state of facts the "State Department asks to the ERC that Fry be repatriated under penalty of not being able to meet the demands of visas"³⁰ (Laurent, 2000, p. 69).

Varian Fry will be treated with ingratitude and pettiness. Abandoned by all, even those he had helped, he died in 1957 of a heart attack, at the age of 59. He became Professor of Latin at a private college. As Jean-Pierre Laurent mentions "Fry met the fate of those which he had changed the destiny: rescuer of the undesirables, he was sentenced to be undesirable himself, not a martyr, but, in the deeper sense of the term which had been described by the writer Jean Malaquais, an 'outlaw' "³¹ (Laurent, 2000, p. 73).

When the French translation of his book *Livrer sur Demande (Delivered on Request)* was published 53 years later, the remembrance of a man, whose action is comparable to that of Oskar Schindler and Raoul Wallenberg, was eventually rehabilitated.

CONCLUSION

During World War II, the silence that surrounded the persecution which Jews were victims of seemed to mean that Europe had sunk into fear and indifference or collaboration. Yet in each of the countries concerned, men and women stood up, shocked by the abuse they witnessed.

In this paper, we have tried to give an example of a hero who we wanted to pay tribute to.

The recognition was awarded to Varian Fry in 1994. Yad Vashem awarded him the honorary title of *Righteous among the Nations* for his actions in favor of the Jews. In his article *La gloire des Justes (the Glory of the Righteous)*, Annette Wiewiorka emphasizes the importance of this national institution dedicated to the memory and the history of the Holocaust created by the State of Israel, in the Act of 1953:

³⁰ Author's translation of: "le département d'Etat demande à l'ERC que Fry soit rapatrié sous peine de ne plus pouvoir répondre aux demandes de visas".

³¹ Author's translation of: "Fry connu le sort de ceux dont il avait transformé le destin: sauveteur des indésirables, il fut condamné à rester indésirable lui-même, non point martyr, mais, au sens profond du terme dont l'avait qualifié l'écrivain Jean Malaquais, un 'hors la loi'".

Yad Vashem, came up with the title, “the Righteous Among of the Nations”, to honor men and women, villages or organizations who had saved Jews. After investigation, a commission chaired by a judge of the Supreme Court, awards this title to the person and gives a certificate, a medal engraved with an inscription: ‘ Gratefulness of the Jewish people. Whoever saves one life saves the entire universe ’. Then, a tree is planted in the alley of the Righteous at Yad Vashem, in Jerusalem, and a plaque recalls the name of the person, of the village, of the distinguished organization for their conduct during the Nazi occupation³². (Wieviorka, 1998, p. 70)

The rehabilitation of this man in his homeland was unfortunately delayed. On September 13, 1967, a few months before his death, he receives a belated recognition at the French Consulate in New York, and is made Knight of the Legion of Honor. In 1991, the United States Holocaust Memorial Council awards him the Eisenhower Liberation Medal. He also received the citizenship of honor of the State of Israel on January 1, 1998. On the initiative of Samuel V. Brock, consul general of the United States in Marseille from 1999 to 2002, the park in front of the American Consulate in Marseille was renamed Place Varian Fry.

Finally, it seems imperative to point out that these rescue actions by Varian Fry in Marseille, allow “to draw a Resistance before the Resistance”³³ (Mencherini, 2000, p. 17) and legitimate, this way, a guaranteed exile to refugees, allowing them to find a safe haven. As argued by Jean - Michel Guiraud, “the action of Varian Fry [...] is located at the crossroad of European uncertainties before deportation and extermination [...] unbearable disaster in history”³⁴ (Guiraud, 1999, p. 23).

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³² Author's translation of: “Yad Vashem, imagina le titre de “ Juste des nations ” pour honorer hommes et femmes villages ou organisations qui avaient sauvé des Juifs. Après enquête, celui ou celle auquel une commission, présidée par un juge de la Cour suprême, décerne ce titre se voit remettre un certificat, une médaille gravée d'une inscription: ‘ Le peuple juif reconnaissant. Quiconque sauve une vie sauve l'univers entier ’. Un arbre est alors planté dans l'allée des Justes, à Yad Vashem, à Jérusalem, et une plaque rappelle le nom de la personne, du village, de l'organisation distinguée pour leur conduite pendant l'occupation nazie”.

³³ Author's translation of: “de dessiner une *Résistance avant la Résistance*”.

³⁴ Author's translation of: “l'action de Varian Fry [...] se situe au carrefour des incertitudes européennes avant que n'interviennent déportation et extermination [...] *désastre insupportable de l'histoire*”.

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RESUMO

Em 1940, um jovem jornalista americano Varian Fry é enviado para Marselha. Sua missão oficial: libertar artistas confinados no *Camp des Milles*, intelectuais e ativistas políticos de esquerda, muitas vezes judeus ameaçados pela Gestapo. *Intelligentsia* que a Segunda Guerra Mundial obrigou ao exílio, à clandestinidade.

Estes intelectuais encontraram abrigo no sul da França, nomeadamente em Sanary-sur-Mer, onde vamos encontrar uma grande parte da *Intelligentsia* alemã e na Villa Ar-Bel em Marselha último porto de saída frente à invasão nazi que se aproximava. Varian Fry abre o *American Relief Center*, organização modesta que se opõe ao artigo 19 do armistício entre a França e Alemanha: “O governo francês deve entregar todos os cidadãos designados pelo governo do Reich”. Em treze meses, antes que a polícia de Vichy expulse Varian Fry - com o consentimento dos Estados Unidos – o *American Relief Center* terá, por meios legais ou ilegais, salvo milhares de pessoas. Esta ação de socorro reconhecida como uma “resistência antes da Resistência” aparece hoje como um movimento de solidariedade internacional.

O nosso propósito traduz-se na vontade de dar a conhecer, de esclarecer este momento histórico e único, homenageando, desta forma, o heroísmo de um indivíduo comum face à irracionalidade do Estado.

ABSTRACT

In 1940, a young American journalist, Varian Fry, is sent to Marseille. His official mission: to free artists, mostly locked up in Camp des Milles, intellectuals and left wing political activists, quite often Jewish, threatened by the Gestapo. During World War II, *Intelligentsia* had been forced to exile or to go underground. These intellectuals found refuge in the south of France more specifically in Sanary-sur-Mer where we will find a big part of the German intelligentsia and at the Air-Bel villa in Marseille, last port of exit facing the approach of the Nazi invasion. Varian Fry sets up the simple organization of the American Relief Center which goes against article 19 of the Armistice convention between France and Germany: “The French government is bind to deliver under demand all appointed nationals by the Reich government”.

In a period of thirteen months, before the Vichy police expels Varian Fry – with the agreement of the United States – the American Relief Center will have saved, by legal or illegal means, thousands of people. This action of relief has been called “the resistance before the Resistance”, and it emerges today as a movement of international solidarity.

We propose to clarify this historic and unique moment as well as pay tribute to the heroism of the ordinary individual before the State unreasonability.